

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 065 016

FL 003 449

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TITLE Teaching Deep Culture.
PUB DATE 29 Apr 72
NOTE 3p.; Speech presented at the joint meeting of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese and the New England Council on Latin American Studies, Fairfield University, Fairfield, Conn., April 29, 1972

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Audiovisual Aids; *Cultural Education; *Curriculum Development; Instructional Program Divisions; *Language Instruction; Language Programs; *Modern Languages; Secondary Education; Secondary Schools; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Practical suggestions for language teachers seeking to teach both "formal" and "deep" culture are proposed in this study. Six projects are outlined, demonstrating how audiovisual materials can be used to facilitate teaching methods. The author advises that "culture" be treated as an integral part of all language courses rather than as a separate subject area. (RL)

ED 065016

FL003 449

TEACHING DEEP CULTURE

by

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Among the many difficulties the foreign language teacher encounters in the area of skill teaching, the "teaching" of culture presents the greatest challenge. First of all I believe it is of the utmost importance to examine the idea of "teaching" culture-formal and deep. We can more readily teach formal culture since a series of facts can accompany the study of a painting, monument or literary work. Thus, the impartation of data and facts on the part of the teacher makes this a teaching situation which, to me, differs from the impartation of deep culture to our students.

When we begin to speak of deep culture we are dealing with a much more subtle and difficult aspect of culture. Subtle because we are treating the life style and customs of the target community and difficult because we are not so well versed in this area as we are in the area of formal culture. Trying to teach a way of life already existing in another people is an almost impossible task.

I prefer to use the word assimilate when I speak of "teaching" deep culture. The teacher can present an outlook and a life style; the student in this instance is not learning culture in the same way he is taught and learns to read but rather he must begin to integrate the deep culture presented to him into his own life style. He, in other words, begins to assimilate and empathize with the target people. For example, we teachers of Spanish can teach a great deal about GUERNICA and the formal culture germane to the work. Can we teach the salutations and typically Spanish gestures which accompany them in the same way? No. If we wish our students to become more "Spanish", we must help them assimilate the gestures and use them in real, relevant life situations.

How then do we "teach" deep culture so that our students will be able to assimilate? We must continually provide the real situation where the student can show what he has integrated into his own way of life - customs, gestures, and the everyday life-style of the target people. The following are a series of project suggestions which the teacher may undertake with a class or two classes. Many projects require media of various types - video tape, motion picture, slides, and overhead transparencies to mention a few.

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PROJECT 1. The use of formal culture to "teach" deep culture. We all consider a work of literature to belong to the area labeled formal culture. Thus, when a literary work is "taught" in class, it too often is left undone. That is to say not all the culture is presented. For example, the reading of LAZARILLO DE TORMES gives a delightfully entertaining exposé of sixteenth century Spain as well as a unique opportunity to take up the relevant problems of today. A junior class in high school was assigned the LAZARILLO to read. The edition used was abridged and each chapter was read in class with the teacher. The next class consisted of a discussion of that chapter by the class in very small groups. The regular class text was still completed and the project did not interfere with the standard curriculum. Perhaps 15 minutes per class were devoted to the project. Once complete, the class undertook the writing of a play based on the novel. After corrections were made by the teacher, rehearsals began which also involved the drama coach for proper expression and posing. Simultaneously the students made their own costumes, a true experience especially for an all male class. Once ready, several days were devoted to taking slides at carefully chosen spots on campus which lent themselves to the scenery needed. After the slides were developed, a taped commentary was produced, which made a golden age novel relevant to modern times by discussing the themes of being chained to one's environment, social injustice, ghettos and the modern day picaro.

PROJECT 2. A contrastive approach to deep culture. A freshman class of boys in a level one Spanish class chose foods of Spain, Mexico and the U.S. as a project. Once given various recipes the boys took command of a mother's kitchen one Saturday and prepared paella, enchiladas, rolls, bacon and eggs, flan, and cherry pie. Their purpose was to show, through doing and assimilating, the difference between the foods and eating habits of the Spanish speaking and people of the U.S. Their presentation consisted of a super 8 film and commentary of the foods, origins and meal times all done in Spanish.

PROJECT 3. A discussion on soccer and football with the use of home made overhead transparencies to explain the various plays via a taped commentary in Spanish. This project was chosen by two boys in a level one class whose ability and attitude were lacking. While doing the project, marked improvement in attitude was noted as well as an improvement in Spanish.

PROJECT 4. Two seniors in a level four class who had spent a summer in Spain decided to do a contrast between American and Spanish architecture of various centuries. They used slides taken of buildings in Spain and then took slides in some of our surrounding towns. The purpose was to point out the differences between the living and working styles of the two cultures and how this influences the architecture. A taped commentary in Spanish was then produced to accompany the slides.

PROJECT 5. Using the well known text A GESTURE INVENTORY OF THE SPANISH LANGUAGE by Green, a group of level one students did role playing in Spanish. This was effected by posing the question, ¿Qué hace el español en--- (What does the Spaniard do---) in a particular situation. The students showed the various gestures which accompany various Spanish expressions. Again we can see the deep culture being assimilated and used.

PROJECT 6. A video tape recording. Two level four classes chose to write a play portraying the problems the Spanish speaking community has in a large American city. The entire production was completed by the classes. The only help given by the teacher was in correcting the script and proper pronunciation and intonation. The class had studied television in another course and proved very capable of operating the equipment. Not all students acted; some operated equipment, others prompted, one directed and one produced. An excellent piece of work based on library research and field research in the surrounding cities of Bridgeport and Norwalk, Connecticut which both have large Spanish speaking communities.

Hopefully I have shown through actual class projects how deep culture can be so presented that the student has no alternative than to become involved, assimilate and eventually appreciate the foreign culture he is studying. An active involvement on the part of teacher and student will yield great results in linguistic and cultural skills and appreciation respectively.

As you can see the "teaching" of deep culture begins in my classes at the very early stages and never stops. Culture is indeed an integral part of the course - in fact it is the language itself. Never should culture be reserved for a specific "CULTURE COURSE" or relegated to the occasional showing of a movie or filmstrip. Culture - formal and deep - must be the over present fifth "skill" in all language courses at all levels of instruction.